State of California—The Resources Agency

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY
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Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: July 9, 2007

From : Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 11(d) 3: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for the purchase of capital assets to be used in the protection and restoration of natural resources, including projects for the control of erosion, control and elimination of exotic species, prescribed burning, and fuel hazard reduction.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for the purchase of capital assets to be used in the protection and restoration of natural resources , in the amount of $500,000.

Legislative Authority:

Section 33204.27 of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Act authorizes grants to local agencies for the purposes of Section 33204.2(a), *viz.,*

> to carry out improvements, maintenance, acquisitions, . . . that directly relate to a project that the conservancy is otherwise authorized to undertake pursuant to this division.

With Respect to Proposition 84:

Pursuant to Section 75005(m) of the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, "Protection" means those actions necessary to prevent harm or damage to persons, property or natural resources or those actions necessary to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural resources and includes acquisition, development, restoration, preservation and interpretation.

Pursuant to Section 75005(n) of the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, "Restoration" means the improvement of physical structures or facilities and, in the case of natural systems and landscape features includes, but is not limited to, projects for the control of erosion, ***the control and elimination of exotic species, prescribed burning, fuel hazard reduction,*** fencing out threats to existing or restored natural resources, road elimination, and other plant and wildlife habitat improvement to increase the natural system value of the property. Restoration projects shall include the planning, monitoring and reporting necessary to ensure successful implementation of the project objectives. [Emphasis added.]

Background: Last year California voters authorized $56,000,000 from Proposition 84, the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy for capital outlay and grants for protection and restoration of land and water resources in the watershed of the Upper Los Angeles River and the Santa Monica Bay and its watersheds.

Resource Protection Objective: Prop. 84 provides for watershed/resource protection. Although natural fire is a critical element of our Mediterranean ecosystem, uncontrolled and unnatural man-made fire can yield disastrous results. Fire intensities and residency times can permanently damage native plants, and cause entire areas to be "type converted" to invasive species. Water quality can be impacted due to excessive runoff and silt accumulation following a wildland fire.

Role of Prescribed Burning: Prescribed burning (also called prescription/controlled fire) is an effective tool that can be used during the watershed/resource restoration process. It is used to reduce total fuel load and to eliminate exotic species. The National Park Service and California State Parks regularly perform prescribed burns to accomplish these objectives in the Santa Monica Mountains. The National Park Service Fire Management Plan for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area provides:

> Under the managent preferred alternative, which is also the “environmentally preferred” alternative (Alternative 2, Mechanical Fuel Reduction/Ecological Prescribed Fire/Strategic Fuels Treatment) prescribed burning is used to provide resource enhancement. In addition, hazard fuel reduction projects using prescribed fire or mechanical fuel reduction are considered in strategic locations to reduce the chance of wildfires which may damage life and property or impact natural and cultural resources. (69 Fed. Reg. 33656, June 16, 2004.)

California State Parks also recognizes the role of prescribed burning in the restoration of natural processes. The California State Parks report of 2004 stated:

> Central to State Parks' strategy of natural resource restoration is the restoration of natural processes and the removal of artificial processes. Over the past 50 years, wildfire has been effectively excluded from state parklands. However, current land management science has determined that fire is a necessary element in the natural ecological process. Cyclical fire provides for greater biodiversity by allowing the natural succession of vegetation. It also reduces the build-up of large fuel sources, thereby preventing catastrophic fire events. There are also inherent fluctuations in the process of prescribed burning due to numerous variables that affect fire application such as weather, staffing schedules, availability of cooperating agencies, and length of burn season. (See http://www.parks.ca.gov/2004_Report/)

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy has an obligation to keep its management practices consistent with those of California State Parks. Section 33211.5 (d)(1) of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Act provides:

> The conditions of use and types of uses of property owned or subject to the management of the conservancy are considered to be of statewide significance. *The types of uses and the management policies affecting those uses shall be consistent with the policies for permitted uses of lands within the state park system*. [Emphasis added.]

Therefore it is clear that prescribed burning is a resource protection/enhancement tool called for by both the National Park Service and California State Parks within the Santa Monica Mountains.

Reciprocal Management Agreement: The Conservancy and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) have a reciprocal management agreement covering MRCA management of Conservancy property and Conservancy management of MRCA property within the Santa Monica Mountains Zone and Rim of the Valley Corridor. The purpose of this agreement is to provide consistency of land management practices so as to promote efficiency in resource protection and to present a seamless management regime to the public. Without this reciprocal management agreement there could be a hodgepodge of different management policies and conflicting and confusing rules and regulations.

Fuel Management and Resource Protection by MRCA: The MRCA has a comprehensive program of fuel management and resource protection. The Authority has made a number of comprehensive presentations to the Conservancy on its activities in this regard, the most recent of which was on April 30, 2007 when the Conservancy adopted the 2007 Vegetation Management and Fire Prevention Program.

Equipment Grant Request from MRCA: The Authority has requested a grant for capital equipment specifically designed and suited for the prescribed burn/resource protection function. MRCA is requesting not to exceed $500,000 for purchase of a Type III engine and Type II water tender, each with a CAF system.

The leading industry publication recently (April 2007) cited a long list of benefits from compressed air foam systems:

> [I]improved firefighter safety; improved efficiency of water and less water use; faster knockdown times and fewer rekindles. Because CAF uses less water, there is decreased property damage and better preservation of evidence, less runoff, faster cleanup and reduced time on-scene.
>
> *See: http://www.fireapparatusmagazine.com/hp_article_0407b.htm#top*

Compressed Air Foam (CAF) systems have unique value in providing watershed/resource protection. Biodegradable Class A foam has many applications, including minimizing mechanical/bulldozer lines during suppression and prescription/controlled burns. It has been widely recognized that bulldozer lines during prescribed burns, and other fire events, can cause significant resource damage, especially to protected species and historical/cultural/archaeological resources. The CAF system allows an effective alternative to this resource destructive practice.